



Impact of satisfactions with psychological reward and pay on Chinese nurses' work attitudes☆☆☆☆



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To examine the impact of satisfaction with psychological rewards (received from the head nurse and from physicians) and with pay on Chinese nurses' work attitudes.

Method: We conducted a cross-sectional survey in China. A total of 413 nurses completed our survey. We examined the effect of satisfactions with psychological rewards and pay on work attitudes by performing a series of hierarchical regression analyses.

Findings: We found that both satisfaction with pay and satisfaction with psychological rewards from the head nurse significantly predicted work attitudes, whereas satisfaction with psychological rewards from physicians did not.

Conclusions: Our results illustrate that when nurses feel satisfied with their pay and the psychological rewards received from the head nurse they exhibit more positive work attitudes.

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1. Introduction

Good service delivery is a crucial element of the achievement of hospital goals. Given the fact that nurses are one of the largest employee groups in the health care sector, having enough skilled and motivated nurses is critical in order to deliver effective services and improve health outcomes. However, a shortage of qualified nurses continues to raise concerns about their impact in terms of service quality and hospital budget. While improved strategies of recruiting nurses are needed, motivating and rewarding employed nurses is equally important. A great number of studies have linked rewards to various attitudinal and behavioral employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, retention and organizational citizenship behaviors (Hoffman

& Woehr, 2006). One nurses' early exit (NEXT) study indicated that the risk of leaving the profession was higher when nurses perceived a high effort–reward imbalance, and reward frustration (i.e. earnings, promotion prospects, esteem and recognition) (Li et al., 2011). Previous findings also report strong associations between having low rewards and job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Hsu, Chiang, Chang, Guang, & Chen, 2013).

In China, nurses fall into two categories having the same job responsibilities: contract nurses and bianzhi nurses. A bianzhi nurse owns a lifetime employment which is guaranteed by the state and comes with extensive benefits, whereas a contract nurse is hired by a hospital with no or reduced benefits (Shang et al., 2014). In order to lower the financial costs, more contract nurses are employed by hospitals to solve the problem of nursing shortage. Inequities in benefits and salaries between contract nurses and bianzhi nurses adversely affect nurses' commitment, turnover intention and job satisfaction (Shang et al., 2014), which prompts managers to look for non-financial alternatives. Although a large number of studies has focused on the relationship between rewards and employee attitudes, evidence for the Chinese nursing context is limited. The ability to determine whether financial rewards or psychological rewards have a stronger impact on nurses' work attitudes could help managers to better understand what stimulates their employees' engagement. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to examine the impact of satisfaction with rewards on Chinese

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nurses' work attitudes. Here, we focus on the affective components of work attitudes, being turnover intention, job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment.

1.1. Literature review

Affective events theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) served as a theoretical foundation in our study to explain the relationship between rewards and nurses' work attitudes. AET proposes that employees react emotionally to events surrounding their job and that this influences their performance and attitudes. Different events (e.g. conflicting directions by different managers, getting support from colleagues/supervisor) can trigger negative or positive emotional reactions, which influence a number of behavioral and attitudinal variables such as organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. In addition, Chinese people value interpersonal relations that are based on reciprocity, that is, the more rewards employees perceive to receive from their supervisors, the more positive work behaviors and work attitudes they will expose in performing their duties. When the supervisors fail to provide financial or emotional resources, the employees are more likely to withdraw and disengage themselves from their roles.

Employers provide rewards, that is, anything an employee may value that an employer is willing to offer in exchange for the employee's contribution (Henderson, 2003). Several motivation theories have explored the prominent role of rewards and satisfaction with rewards in fostering and promoting employees' attitudes and behaviors. Most scholars examining the relationship between rewards and employees' attitudes and behavior have primarily concentrated on the role of financial rewards. Financial rewards are all of the monetary payments that a nurse receives for doing his/her job (e.g., base pay, bonus). Pay, as a tangible value, is the most obvious return for nurses' effort in terms of an economic exchange relationship. As a result, satisfaction with financial rewards is often operationalized as 'pay satisfaction'. Nursing literature also found that nurses are often dissatisfied with their pay (Zhang et al., 2014). Moreover, Chan, Tam, Lung, Wong, and Chau (2013) revealed that pay satisfaction was negatively related to nurses' turnover intention, through job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

In addition to financial rewards, satisfaction with psychological rewards matters to nurses (De Gieter, De Cooman, Pepermans, & Jegers, 2010). Psychological rewards are as the positively evaluated outcomes of professional nurse's interpersonal relationships with his/her supervisor, colleagues and/or clients. They are a key component of the social exchange relationship. In this exchange relationship, employees invest time and effort into their job, and in return, employers reward them with psychological rewards, satisfying their intrinsic need for recognition. Psychological rewards facilitate employees' engagement, and experiencing a lack of these rewards might contribute to employees' burnout and feelings of low self-worth (Schreuder, Roelen, Koopmans, Moen, & Groothoff, 2010). An acknowledgement, an appropriate word of praise or recognition from supervisors, increase nurses' job satisfaction and decrease their turnover intention (Tourangeau, Cranley, Laschinger, & Pachis, 2010). Unlike financial rewards, psychological rewards are characterized by their informal nature and low cost. On the one hand, they can be provided in an informal manner by the supervisor or head nurse and immediately following a remarkable performance. On the other hand, they cost less (or do not require any financial investment at all) because it only requires time, willingness and effort from the supervisor to psychologically reward an employee.

To measure nurses' satisfaction with psychological rewards, De Gieter et al. (2010) developed and validated the Psychological Reward Satisfaction Scale (i.e., PReSS). According to their work, nurses can receive psychological rewards from two parties: their head nurse and the physicians they work with. Therefore, the PReSS contains two subscales of four items each, assessing nurses' satisfaction with psychological rewards received from their head nurse and from physicians. De

Gieter et al. (2010) conducted an empirical study with a sample of Belgian hospital nurses, and concluded that satisfaction with psychological rewards from the head nurse had an important impact on nurses' work attitudes. When combining satisfaction with psychological rewards from the head nurse and satisfaction with pay, the effect of pay satisfaction disappeared. Satisfaction with psychological rewards from physicians did not seem to influence nurses' turnover intention or job satisfaction significantly, but it had a small positive effect on their affective organizational commitment ($\beta = .10$). Nevertheless, the authors of the PReSS called for more research on the role of psychological rewards and satisfaction with psychological rewards in other countries outside Europe.

In this study, we examine the effect of satisfaction with financial as well as psychological rewards, on three particular attitudes: turnover intention, job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment. First, turnover intention reflects the probability that an employee will leave his or her job within a certain time period (Sousa-Poza & Henneberger, 2002) and is considered an immediate precursor of actual turnover. As Hayes and colleagues suggested in their recent meta-analysis (2012), nurse turnover intention is related to a variety of factors, such as the psychosocial work environment, workload and the imbalance between effort and rewards.

Second, job satisfaction is defined as the positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job (Locke, 1976). Numerous factors have been found to be associated with job satisfaction in previous studies: working conditions, relationships at the workplace, the work itself, praise and recognition, remuneration, self-growth, possibility for promotion, responsibility, job security, leadership styles, organizational policies and so on (Han, Moon, & Yun, 2009).

Finally, affective organizational commitment reflects an employee's positive emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). We have focused on this type of organizational commitment as it emphasizes employees' attitudinal and emotional attachment to the organization. Different factors may influence nurses' affective organizational commitment, such as their own socialization, organizational changes, human resource practices, and interpersonal relations as well as their commitment to the nursing profession (Morrow, 2010).

1.2. Hypotheses

In recent years, a large number of studies have been conducted on the outcomes of nurses' pay satisfaction. Whether (dis)satisfaction with psychological rewards could influence Chinese nurses' work attitudes, however, remains unknown. Yet, based on the relationships between satisfaction with psychological rewards and nurses' turnover intention, job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment found in European studies (e.g., De Gieter et al., 2010), we hypothesize that:

H1. Satisfaction with psychological rewards (from the head nurse and from physicians) and with pay are related to turnover intention.

H2. Satisfaction with psychological rewards (from the head nurse and from physicians) and with pay are related to job satisfaction.

H3. Satisfaction with psychological rewards (from the head nurse and from physicians) and with pay are related to affective organizational commitment.

2. Methods

2.1. Procedure & participants

A convenience sample of nurses was recruited from five teaching hospitals located in Jinan City (province of Shandong). Considering the aim of the study, only data from nurses were included, while data from nursing assistants and head nurses were excluded from our

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